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INFO RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE 0026  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 0727  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0225  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0023  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0135  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001153

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DEPT FOR NEA/I AND PRM/ANE  
AMMAN AND CAIRO FOR REFCOORDS KANESHIRO AND CHEYNE  
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2016

TAGS: PREF PREL KPAL XF IZ JO

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON PALESTINIANS ON JORDAN-IRAQ BORDER

REF: A. APRIL 6 KANESHIRO-HILL EMAILS  
1B. BAGHDAD 979  
1C. AMMAN 2061  
1D. JERUSALEM 1145  
1E. AMMAN 2046  
1F. BAGHDAD 918 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M.  
Satterfield for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see paras 10  
and 11.

12. (C) Summary: Following the March 18 exodus of 88  
Palestinians from Baghdad, we have received news that at  
least 33 more have fled to the makeshift camp on the  
Iraqi side of the Jordanian border (23 individuals on  
April 1, and a subsequent ten on April 2). Palestinian  
representatives told PolFSN April 6 that the Palestinian  
community received even more threatening letters over the  
past week accusing the Palestinians of being Saddamists  
and indicating that they must leave or face death.

PLO/DORA has advised Amman RefCoord that Mahmud Abbas  
plans to issue a statement urging Palestinians to remain  
in Baghdad. The office of UNSYG Kofi Annan has sent  
UNHCR a letter requesting an update to its emergency  
contingency plan for Palestinians in Iraq, a plan to  
assist the Palestinians at the border, and requirements  
to improve protection of Palestinians in Baghdad. We  
understand UNHCR has already begun to address these  
issues. UNHCR is also planning a second assessment visit  
to the Palestinians at the border. We understand from  
ref A that PA President Mahmud Abbas plans to issue a  
statement urging Palestinians to remain in Baghdad. The  
Abbas statement could prove to be the best short-term way  
to help calm Palestinians in Baghdad. As previously  
reported, legislative fixes to the Palestinians' status,  
or even increased patrols by MNF-I, may not be sufficient  
to infuse a sense of security within the Palestinian  
community in Iraq. An updated UNHCR contingency plan  
would be a welcome development. For our part, we  
continue to follow-up with ISF, MOI, MOD, MoDM, and MNF-I  
on ways to enhance protection and calm the Palestinian  
community. End Summary.

Additional Arrivals at the Border; More May Follow

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¶3. (C) On April 2, the President of the Palestinian Human Rights Organization in Iraq, Muhammed Abid Mutlak Mowsiq, called PolFSN to inform her of additional migration of Baghdad Palestinians to the Jordanian border. He later informed her that 33 had left Baghdad permanently in two trips April 1 and 2 and had joined other Palestinians currently at the border.

¶4. (SBU) On April 6, Palestinian representatives provided PolFSN with copies of letters they had sent to international human rights organizations and communities, including the UN, asking for their help and support. One of the letters said the Palestinian refugees in Baghdad have asked the UN, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and Iraqi authorities for help, but that nothing had been done and their situation is becoming worse day after day. The letter said that only the Iraqi Red Crescent helped the Palestinians at the border, but such help was not enough. (Note: UNHCR told PolOff that its implementing partner Islamic Relief was conducting a needs assessment and would be assuming responsibility for providing assistance to the refugees at the border under UNHCR auspices.)

¶5. (SBU) In a subsequent April 6 phone conversation, a Palestinian community representative told PolFSN that Palestinian residents in Baghdad had received additional threatening letters commanding Palestinians to leave or be "neutralized." The letter accused all Palestinians of being Saddamists and Baathists.

Mahmud Abbas Plans Statement to Palestinians in Baghdad

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¶6. (SBU) We understand from ref A that PLO/DORA reports that Mahmud Abbas is planning to issue a statement to the Palestinians in Baghdad, apparently urging them to stay in Iraq (ref A). Reportedly, PLO/DORA does not yet have the text of the Abbas statement.

Annan Directs UNHCR to Update Plan for Iraqi Palestinians

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¶7. (SBU) On April 6, UNHCR Amman advised Amman RefCoord that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan instructed UNHCR on April 4 to update urgently its strategy for Palestinian refugees in Iraq in consultation with UNAMI and UNRWA (ref A). The new plan will be designed by UNHCR Geneva and address contingency plans for large scale movements, ongoing assistance to Palestinians at the borders, and requirements to improve protection in Baghdad. We further understand that UNHCR held a brainstorming session in Amman April 6 to send back "all options." These range from improving capacity to stay in Iraq to country-specific regional integration options, including an offer apparently made by the Kurdish Regional Government to absorb Palestinians into northern Iraq, as well as a new approach the Egyptian Embassy apparently made to UNHCR Iraq offering to accept Palestinians in Iraq who hold Egyptian travel documents. UNHCR indicated that UNRWA has weighed in by informing UNHCR that Syria has definitely refused to allow entry of any more Palestinians from Iraq. Reportedly the Palestinian Charge d'Affaires in Baghdad has informed UNAMI that all Palestinians in Iraq want to leave and that "the PA would facilitate entry" to the West Bank/Gaza but that he doubted the Israeli or Jordanian governments would facilitate transit. As we have previously reported, legislative fixes to the Palestinians' status or even increased patrols by MNF-I may not be sufficient to infuse a sense of security within the Palestinian community here. An updated UNHCR contingency plan would be a welcome development.

UNHCR Plans Assessment Mission to Palestinians at Border

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¶8. (SBU) UNAMI advised Baghdad RefCoord April 6 that it has submitted a request for MNF-I support for a second

UNHCR assessment mission to the Palestinians at the Iraq-Jordan border. UNHCR confirmed to Amman RefCoord that this mission was in the works ahead of the instruction to UNHCR to update its strategy for Iraqi Palestinians (ref A). UNHCR Amman/Iraq's timetable is flexible; they are willing to wait the normal 10 days processing for this support if it cannot be expedited. The mission will be a two-person team -- a UNHCR Amman security officer and a UNHCR Iraq protection officer. The Jordanian Interior Ministry has already approved UNHCR's request to conduct this second cross-border assessment mission of the Palestinians on the Iraqi side of the border.

Comment and Action Requests

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¶19. (C) Comment: The sense of fear among the Palestinian community in Iraq remains critically high. The planned statement by Abbas urging Palestinians in Iraq not to move towards the borders would be helpful. Swift development and implementation of a revised UNHCR strategy for Palestinians in Iraq in the very near future would also be a positive step to preventing a potential crisis at one or another of the international borders. Embassy notes that UNHCR would have no authority or ability to provide physical security to Palestinian neighborhoods -- this would fall to Iraqi security forces or other security providers in Iraq. However, UNHCR does have the authority to explore potential alternative durable solutions outside Baghdad which might offer a more secure environment for Palestinians, and we look forward to hearing their thoughts. Embassy Baghdad continues to follow-up with ISF, MOI, MOD, and MNF-I on ways to enhance protection and calm the Palestinian community. End Comment.

¶10. (SBU) Action request for PRM: Request that PRM ask RMA Geneva to follow up with UNHCR Geneva for speedy development of a revised strategy for Palestinians in Iraq, including delineation of security requirements and evaluation of potential alternative durable solutions outside Baghdad.

¶11. (C) Action request for NEA/I: Request that Department ask CG Jerusalem to make the following points to Mahmoud Abbas about the situation of Palestinians in Iraq:

-- Understand you plan to make a statement urging Palestinians in Baghdad to remain in Iraq.

-- We are concerned that panic among the Palestinians in Iraq could lead to a crisis at the Iraqi-Jordanian border.

-- Urge you to issue the statement, and provide us with a copy, as quickly as possible.

-- Embassy Baghdad is following up with MOI, MOD, MODM, ISF, and UNHCR to see what can be done to improve security for the Palestinians in Iraq.

-- Our Embassy in Baghdad will remain in touch with the Palestinian community.

-- MNF-I is facilitating the travel of a second UNHCR assessment mission to the Palestinians who have moved to the Iraqi-Jordanian border.

KHALILZAD